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Miss Ruby

• J. C. Hulme

MISS RUBY might have gone on roaming the fields until daybreak, trying to scare the cotton up, had not the children begun crying for her. She was at the house in a wink but something was wrong; it was not quite any known or remembered place. "Here, here! What is going on here?" she said sternly, for the door was locked and grinning at her. Through the door rang her voice in a defiant croon: "Mama is coming, children. Jamie — Will — Katie — never you mind, your Mama is here." Rattling the latch she remembered in a surge of panic how frail as a bird's were the bones in the small vulnerable bodies of her children. Whatever had possessed her to leave them alone for one minute? "You open," she whispered fiercely, low enough so that the children might not hear and grow more alarmed, all the while beating quietly with the heels of her palms against the spiteful wood. "You open, I tell you! Can't you hear my own calling to me?"

But slowly the sound that had been her children crying became only the wind whistling through its teeth, saying rain was on the way. It had been coming in by a crack in her dream. Waking, she found herself at the window pushing gently against the screen, the bellying organdy curtain slapping at her face.

Not all at once, however, did the bedroom declare itself. A moment was needed for the time and the place of the dream to go, and while it went she leaned with her hands against the window frame for support. But Miss Ruby got around to being an old woman in her daughter's house again, an old woman standing motionless, like the night's own surprised white shadow, looking down at her gown and bare feet and the long loosened hair running wild over her shoulders.

Turning to find the bed again, feeling her way cautiously as if this room had been entered for the first time and there was still to be learned that a chair stood here and a dresser there, she started at the sound of distant thunder, saying aloud, "Was that what it was? Was it the rising cloud out yonder that got me up? I believed I was over all this. I haven't walked about in my sleep since I don't know when."

The mischief had begun after her husband died and stopped when she lost the farm he left her. This must be the first time she had done it since then. My, how strange it was to catch yourself at it, after years and years of thinking you had put it forever behind you! Why tonight, she wondered; why in the world tonight?

Miss Ruby eased her head down onto the pillow and remembered how in the old days she would go out the door or window and walk all over creation. The year her youngest brother stayed with her on the farm, the first year she was a widow, he kept saying how he heard her moving about in the night and

she as good as told him he was a liar. And then once that summer she woke him with it, and he followed her out of the house calling, "Ruby, Ruby, you're at it again." She had come to the cedar tree on the bluff above the river before she heard him. At first she thought he was playing some kind of joke — every one of her brothers had been an amiable freckle-faced giant forever ready to play one — but there were the tracks of her bare feet across the plowed field to show how she had come so far and not known about it.

And to think that she had never been the nervous or sickly kind such foolishness might be expected from! It hardly seemed possible that the sturdy young woman she used to see in the mirror, combing her long red hair with a chapped or sunburnt hand, was the one who rose up in sleep and went out in the night. If she wondered about it till her dying day, it still wouldn't be explained away.

Old Miss Ruby heard the nearing thunder grumble and rattle and saw how the lightning bleached the room whiter at each stroke. There was no telling when she hadn't been afraid of a storm. And weren't the storms fearful when she was young: wild black clouds stamping hard rain in their stride across her fields. Even the memory of them was enough; she'd never get to sleep again until she could tell how this coming rain would fall.

It came in her mind that nobody was there to complain if she had a smoke on her old clay pipe. "Ladies don't do such things any more, Mama," Katie never got tired of saying. . . . Well, she knew all that, but just a puff or two would do the trick; a pinch of tobacco and a light on in the room would put the nearing cloud and this lost hour in their proper places. Rising on an elbow she fumbled impatiently in the cluster of frills on the bedside table for the lamp switch.

There, that was better, even if the walls did hit her in the face when the light went on. The hour felt very late, but as the clock was always running down and she was forever forgetting to wind it, there was no way to be sure. It was a marvel Katie wasn't at the door asking if she were all right, after the noise she must have made moving about. Sounds penetrated this little house but there was no friendliness in floor or ceiling. Back home the rafters would crack their knuckles in the dark and seem to tell her, "Now, now; go back to sleep, Ruby." But here there was only a close oppression, and the rooms got to smelling like a child's rubber ball after the windows had been shut for a spell. People used not to build houses the size of matchboxes. In the old days a house was a long time coming into being, with sturdy timbers off your own land; and when it was finished you had something that didn't look as if it had shrunk in the wash. Her father, now, had called for twelve large rooms, because it would have driven him to distraction if he hadn't had space to walk about in.

Sitting up in bed with the smoke weaving amiably before her half-closed eyes, Miss Ruby let her thoughts glide from her father to her mother, that fierce little lady who had battled so hard to fill her with dainty, careful ways. In her mind's eye she saw her mother as she was in her prime, though strangely small in memory, stamping her foot in anger over the big daughter's dreadful needlework; she heard the silent

cry beneath her scolding: "Where is the fine lady I set my heart on raising? Oh, you're him all up and down; you're your father's child, you are!" And Miss Ruby saw the girl she used to be incline an awkward, humble head before this one person in the world who awed her, promising, more to the unspoken cry than to the words she had been hearing, "You just wait, Mama, and see if I don't surprise you some day. Only it will take a little time, I guess, because I'm so slow."

Her pipe would have been too much for that driving little lady to bear. Even Miss Ruby's young husband, Paul, with his laugh and love for the odd angular ways and sayings that all too often were the only result of her struggle for grace, would have turned pale had he known of the habit she acquired after his death. "I can't see the harm," she said aloud defensively to the small cramped room; "all this fuss over a little dried leaf. It helps me to think, I tell you. It always did."

The breeze tugged at the gauzy rose curtains and some insect hurled itself against the screen. She gazed at the softly flickering window and asked herself just what this night's dream had been. She wanted to look it over before it had a chance to lose itself for good.

Oh, yes: the children had been crying for her and she couldn't get to them. "I have dreamed that dream before," she reminded herself, "many and many a time. I had just turned thirty in it, because it wasn't until after Paul died that I had to be in two places at once all the time. And my Jamie was alive. Dear Lord, that's a strange dream for You to let me be dreaming again after all these years. A body'd think that dream didn't belong to me any more, because I've raised the two You spared me and looks like there is nothing left to do."

The thunder was closer now. Wasn't it the summer after her baby's death that she had begun to show how afraid she was of a storm? She'd make sure Katie and Will had plump feather beds to sleep on, because you're safe in a feather bed; she'd always heard that lightning would never strike you there. And the children nearly drove her wild if they didn't come running when she saw a cloud rising and called them to the house. They were made to take their places in the dark parlor, away from the chimney and the piano no one but her husband had known how to play — both things were liable to draw lightning — and they fidgeted and whined till the rain stopped, sweat trickling down their freckled faces in the hot, still room. But wait they had to do; she wasn't going to lose Katie or Will if she could help it.

"I used to think what a relief it would be to get them safely to a size where they would begin to fill up a doorway when they came into a room. There were more sicknesses then than there are nowadays. They've got a cure for nearly everything in this day and age. Why, I lost my baby from a fever nobody even has any more."

"Jamie," she whispered; "oh, my Jamie. It was this time of year that you died, when spring was at the full." There hadn't been any money just then and she couldn't make blossoms by hand . . . she had broken the flowering branches of the honey locust tree to lay on his grave. She never saw one of those trees in bloom without thinking about it.

Jamie had been so little like her,

and so like his father, that it had given her hopes she'd started a whole new race. She did wish her mother had lived to see him; they'd have taken to each other on sight. He was a clever, graceful, dreamy child, with eyes as bright as pieces of new money, and soft, flaxen hair. "There wasn't a bit of me in him," Miss Ruby thought proudly. And when he died it was as if a promise had been denied her.

It was strange how clearly she could remember this child, while with Will and Katie memory was often blurred by too many times coming together at once in her mind. Even the image of her own young self was vague and awkward. Hadn't she been an ample, no-nonsense woman? Not pretty, no, certainly not that; but someone with a quick eye and a firm hand . . . that was the picture.

Like the time Will thought he was grown and wanted to start raising turkeys. She thought she'd never hear the last of the fortune they were bound to make. Even now the thought of it made Miss Ruby smile and shake her head. She'd had her work cut out for her, showing that headstrong boy just why it would not do, just why it was wiser to let her go on looking after things a little while longer.

Her pipe had gone out but Miss Ruby hardly noticed. She was thinking about driving the buggy in to town, letting Katie and Will take the reins by turns under her watchful eye. There she sold the year's cotton and fitted them out from head to foot in whatever took their fancy. Into the stores she led them, dim cool places smelling of leather and cloth, Miss Ruby feeling like a clumsy field hand among the ladies who knew the best goods by sight and touch and spotted a fair price at once. In the presence of women who could afford to spend their time hanging bunches of sweet basil or summer savory upside down to dry in airy rooms or sewing mottoes to hang on the wall, she was an uncomfortable outlander who squinted at their dress, their white skins and pompadours, and the ruffles and laces or whatever the things were that added up to the fashion that year, whichever one it happened to be; they were gazed at earnestly as if she were recording even the manner in which a head was tossed, storing it away in her mind until she had time away from farming and keeping lone watch over her brood to see how it would fit on her. Home they would ride, the children pleased over lagniappe, and she relieved to be going back to her refuge and battleground.

With the breeze blowing on her face she said softly aloud, "And now people come up from Augusta and ride boats over the fields I used to have such a time with. The lane is under water and so is the locust grove and the bluff with that cedar tree Jamie used to like to have me carry him to, because of the mockingbird that was always singing there." After she lost everything, a dam was built on the river and the best part of Lincoln County turned into a lake. Still, it had not been as hard as she'd imagined it would be to leave — by the time all was lost, the children were married and settled in their own homes. The farm didn't even resemble itself. And she was like an old tree grown top-heavy with the roots getting loose in the ground.

"Why do I keep on, what am I keeping on for?" she had asked herself once, watching the hail come

down on her fields, knowing the young cottom was lost and would have to be planted over. Her farm hands had gathered with her on the porch as if her nearness could console them, resign them to skimpy dinners and a hard summer — and she was angry not to be left alone to cry herself, as she said in her best commanding voice, "Be quiet, Tobe; don't cry, Queen . . . if it's happening, it's happening, and that is that."

Miss Ruby knocked the ashes from her pipe into a little tray meant for pins and buttons that lay on the bedside table and put the pipe away in the drawer beside her tobacco pouch. She hadn't noticed any lightning or thunder for some time now. She was of half a mind to get up and go take a good look out the window.

Dropping her gaze she saw the quilt that covered her bed, and for the first time in a very long time she saw it as what it was, the one she'd made from silk and satin scraps one rainy winter over thirty years before. She had always been especially fond of it. Even now when her daughter complained of its being too worn for use, Miss Ruby insisted on having it on her bed. This was the quilt she had "learned" on — having taken to quilting, Miss Ruby had chosen right off to work with the showy materials. The pieces were often uneven and the colors did not match; if you looked at it with a careful, critical eye you found that all the points in the morning stars were not the same, the colors varied. Only after it had been completely finished had she discovered her mistake. Still, when you looked at in in another way, not hunting a harmony of color but seeing only a design, the work became star after star after star, stretching in faded and frayed precision down to the foot of the bed.

"I did better on the bigger patterns," she thought, "the ones like church bells and old windmill. I didn't have the patience or the time to go straining my eyes over little scraps of cloth, what with all the other things I had to do. I was always struggling to make things fit just any which way. If I was to start on a new one tomorrow, I would go about it completely different. Whatever gave me the idea that I was a good hand at quilting?"

She thought sadly and guiltily of the beautiful things her mother's daughter should have made by hand, and of that lady her mother had so wanted to fashion. She would have taught Katie the piano; she would have been firm to Will about his manners. Miss Ruby mourned the gentle, flowerlike woman she had kept tucked away in her mind to be when she got the chance. There had never been time for her, but like a quilt stored away against a never-coming day of need and use, her picture was fresh and not faded from bringing to light like the one of the battling creature she had really been.

It was as if all those years she'd been remembering had narrowed themselves down to the point of this one lonely accusing moment in the middle of the night, this moment over which the shadow of what had been missed or unalterable or forever out of reach was cast, and she sat transfixed with her grey head bent over the makeshift work of her unteachable hands. She clutched the quilt as if to steady herself.

Miss Ruby lay back down and took a deep breath. Suddenly she felt very tired. But she was not to

go to sleep just yet; she had to turn the light off first. "It's only the night," she said; "it's the night and the cloud rising out yonder. A body never has such thoughts by day." The words slowed themselves down in her mind, and the light went away.

Hardly a moment had gone by before there was a young woman standing by the bed. She thought it was Katie come to ask if she were all right, and then she saw the old-fashioned black silk dress and the awry bonnet and knew that it was her own young self.

"Let me go," young Miss Ruby sternly commanded this old woman to whom sleep was beginning to have a way of coming suddenly and unbidden. "Let me go, I tell you," she said, and her voice rang clearly in the stillness, "back to my babies and my fields and all you've left behind you. Let me be about my business. Quilting, my eye. I've a frail child who needs fresh green things from the garden. The planting's to be done over this spring and there's a sick horse I have to doctor."

The old lady smiled contentedly up at this impatient young creature, savoring the reproach of her words. "What could you know about me, you with all the years standing between us? For me, old woman, your long foolish nights are forever yet to come. Just you remember that, because the Lord made it so."

A moth fluttered about the lamp. The lightning was soft and pale at the window. The curtains grew still as a picture, and it began gently to rain.

January

Howard A. Wiley

Sullen slate above, granite ground below.
In between, flesh-buoyant bone in blood
crying the white cold of all it does not know.
Saffron dawns, a thaw, shining ruts of mud
curving to the milken-lucent afternoon
through stalks of frosted grass. Then an icy moon.
Now it is too late for death: creaking arms of elms
fold round the infant flame; joys of motion
grab and hold like steersmen to the winter'd helms;
Veined paps of sense instill an iron devotion
to the faculty to be. Flinty freezing comes.
A bird perches lurching on a wire that hums
above the granite ground; the dark starling flies
across abrasive walls of windwarped sky.

ABRAHAM AND ISAAC
Carl Merschel

Lost Marigold

• Sister Mary Honora, O.S.F.

They had not been attentive to your word
steeped in the marigold of months
with all the summer sirening between
what flowers fear,
and the autumnal bier.
Your subtle wisdom fell upon the ear
more lightly than the mist within
a primrose cup; for when did ever boy
or girl attend
what elders apprehend?

But now inevitably the snowflakes pall
the vesper interlude; the moon
lusters the lawn with xanthic eloquence.
In vain they rise,
although December wise,
to seek familiarly those yellow fields.
They find no chalice holding dew
but vestiges of brittle marigold,
disintegrate —
the hieroglyphs of death.

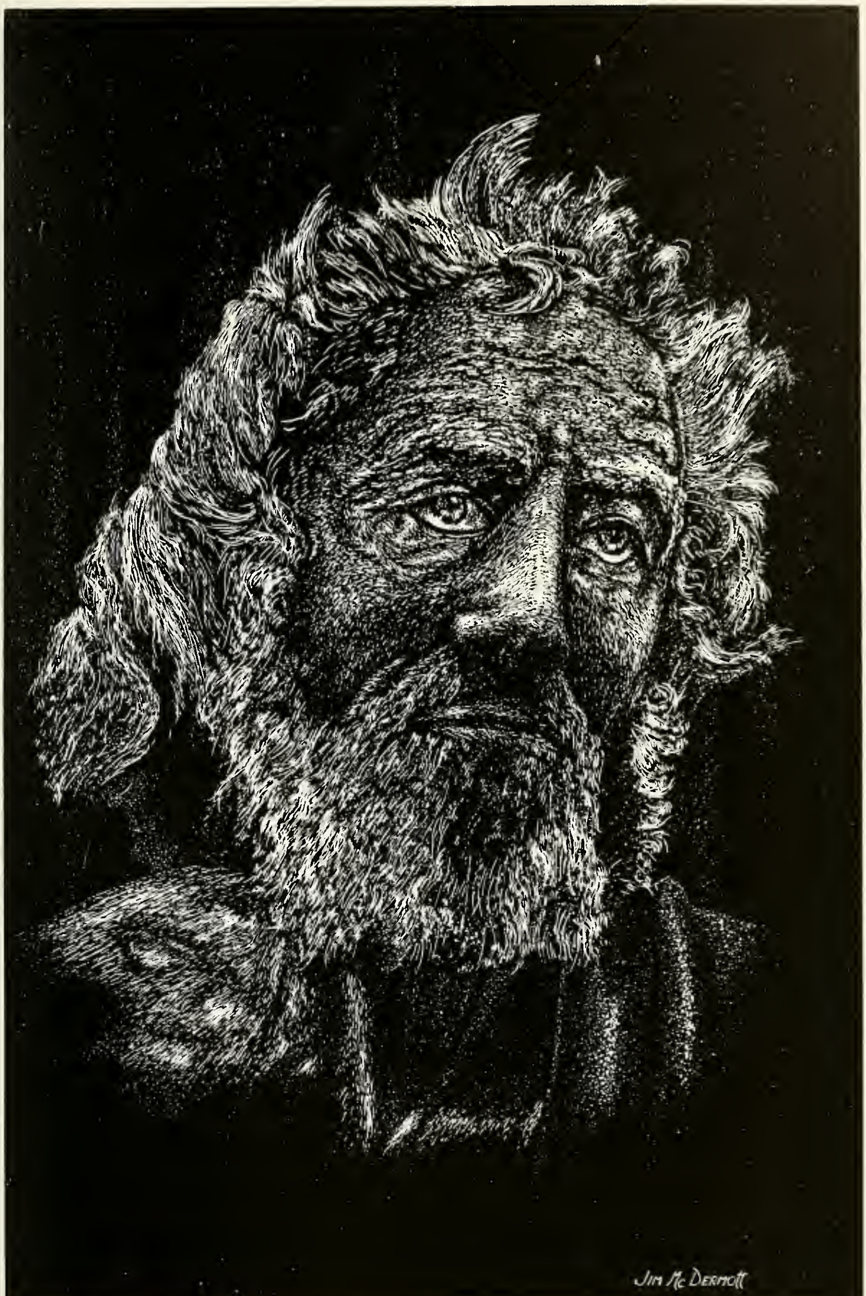
Pasiphae

● Suzanne Gross

In that hour when great stars conjoin
to generate grave lusts and high pomps of passion
Pasiphae saw the bull, gift
of the sea's dark strength and chaos.
She sank her sight in his brutal beauty,
rapt in the vision of that same brilliance
that caught back the swift wrist of death,
feeling even then infections
murmur in her veins.
She moved suspended in his sheer beast being
until her ivory unbroken flesh broke out
in golden flames.
And when the moon was full she sought and found
him.

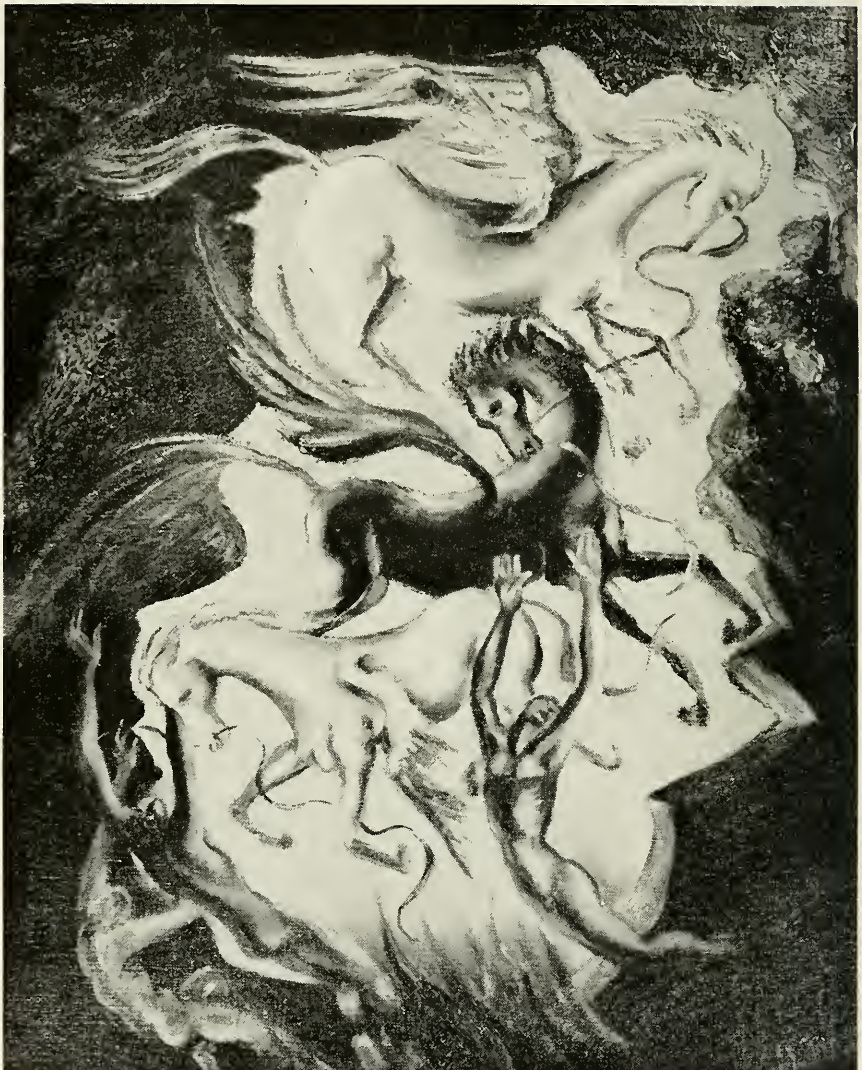
Balefires in his eyes he roared
to greet her into darkness,
and they came together in the shock,
the ecstasy and overwhelm of death
at play, the stop of time.
They in that cherished burial
learned each other's terrifying might
and pitiful fragility.
Sometimes the unhaltered deathless beast
took with careful mouth sweet grasses from her hand.
Sometimes she laid her face upon the curls
between his horns.
And when she left him in the saffron dawns,
going to a sweet exhausted sleep,
he watched her with warm, puzzled eyes,
and lowered head.

When Pasiphae then bore that passion's heir,
she put his fanged mouth to her breast,
fed him on milk mingled with her blood.
She bore the king her husband ivory princesses,
but cherished most that terrible son,
in whom not wholly human, she saw some part divine.
And she grieved less for Athen's slaughtered children
than for him crying with hunger
and rage in his dark prison.



SAINT PETER

James McDermott



THE DEATH OF A POET
Fred Wassall

A Matter of Family

● Claude F. Koch

Editor's Note: A section of the author's novel in progress.

I LEANED against the railing on the sea side of the boardwalk and slid my foot out of the loafer. Just my luck with my hair done up and all for my birthday that *all* my brothers treated me to, to get my heel caught in a loose board or something, and now it was flapping like a biddy's tongue. Two fresh boys with large brown "R's" on white sweaters — they must've been college men because they weren't the least embarrassed to stand and stare and grin at me, and one was smoking a cigar that smelled awful heady — these two fresh fellows tried to strike up a conversation on that old angle of sympathy. One said he'd carry me over to *The Breakers* for a coke. "C'mon, curly," he said, "we'll carry you all the way home if necessary." I turned my back on them, though I couldn't do it ladylike, having that darn shoe in one hand and all. And then they came over and stood on either side of me, too close, and I tried to close my eyes and shut out their voices and think of the padding of feet pushing the rolling chairs behind me, and all the voices of kids in bathing suits, and the smell of the ocean. But the thick smoke of that cigar made me cough. "Go away, you," I said, and opened my eyes and a gull flew past, and then I saw dad.

He was down on the beach a ways, sketching on a pad set on an old easel, and he had his back to me, but I couldn't mistake him. He was tall and thin, just as I can remember him from the very first memory, years and years ago when I rode on his shoulder long before the war, and mom herded the other four behind us down the boardwalk. That was my first memory of him, and it was here at Atlantic City too. I can't ever think of him apart from the sun and the salt air and the salt-water-taffy and cigar smells of the boardwalk. His elbows stuck out, brown from following the sun, I guessed — because none of us had seen him for a year now; and we just sort of took it for granted that he had been at some other place along the coast, Florida or somewheres that he could pick up enough to live on and hear the ocean — but dad always called it the sea. The last year when Johnny ran into him he was demonstrating a gadget for opening cans and paring god knows what all outside a penny arcade by Convention Hall. And Johnny'd come back to the flat we'd rented with Gordie and Paul and Philip, and said "Well, I've seen the old man," and we set out right away, the five of us, to listen to him and buy a gadget. Every year since long before mom died he'd turn up that way doing some odd summer thing, and we'd always go get him and have a reunion, and even Philip, the legal eagle we call him, never could

be really mad at him — and certainly not mom, who just took it for granted that that was the way he was after the war. His pension from the war came in every month, and he'd always sent her something now and then extra, though god knows how he managed to save from the god-awful helter-skelter jobs he must have had. You'd have to be told he was total disability because you'd never know it looking at him there — he looked like any old beaten down fellow who'd gotten gray too soon picking up a slim living on the beach. I saw this as I tried to pull my fingers out from being crushed between that fresh college boy's and the cool rail of the walk.

"Now, princess," the fresh kid said, "you're in distress and we're here to see that you're done right by." He had a nice smile, like Gordie's, with the same kind of big, generous mouth. Mom used to say we should exhibit Gordie — that was in the days when Hunt's Pier had a Ubangi act the first year dad wandered away.

"You oaf," I said, and dug an elbow into his ribs. That's what comes of having four brothers: I learned how to crack ribs. It must've hurt because he grunted and pulled his hand away, and I hobbled down to the slim crowd leaning over the railing watching dad. There was a brown little girl with her hair to her waist on the edge of the rubbernecks, and dad must've seen her, because he was sketching her — yet he wasn't looking that way. All from memory, one glance, I guess — he could do that. He had that kind of memory, and it wasn't only for faces, but dates and names and birthdays and god knows what all. Because something always came to each of us on a birthday though we mightn't of seen him for ages. Usually things he made himself out of driftwood or shells, gadgets that fell apart in a month or had strange smells when the sun got to them. Shell bracelets for me; once a conch shell for Johnny to give him the lonely holler of the sea back home in Philly ('cause, I suspect, Johnny was like dad and he knew it). The last thing mom got from him was shell earrings and it was on their anniversary. That was five years ago and she wasn't able to get out of bed and we couldn't reach him to tell him because there was no return address on the parcel — just the postmark "Pensacola," and even Paul, who's got the best brain of the lot of us, couldn't figure a way to let him know. Mom wouldn't take the earrings off for the rest of the month, but then at last she said I was to have them when she knew it was all up.

I took the other shoe off and stood in my bare feet beside the pigtailed kid and leaned my chin on the top rail, and one of those damn fresh college monkeys patted me and I whacked him with the shoes. Then dad looked around, just a quick disinterested kind of look, and seemed to not know me, but I knew that he did. He just seemed to take the both of us in, the kid and me, with those vague, good-natured, sunken eyes as indefinite colored as driftwood and then he swung back again and kept working. But the pigtails disappeared with his quick crayon strokes that always made me proud of him and the head on his pad was all over curls. Because it isn't everyone whose dad can do that. And that's what it was finally, a snub-nosed kid of seven or so, with a monstrous head of brown curls, and I knew he had done me as I was that first year

he went away. That must've been nine years ago, because when Phil was trying to talk mom into a divorce it was six years ago and I remember clear as rain his saying "This is three year's desertion, Mother." Only Phil called mom Mother. And mom turned away from the dishes (trust Phil not to do any) and winked at me drying, "I'm not deserted, son." Not by a long sight with that pile of dishes. Phil was in law school then, and he'd make a case of anything, without meaning much by it. "And beside," mom said, "Catholics can't get divorces." Phil's always been prissy as all get out: "A separation, then, Mother," he said, mincing each word like he'd a bad smell suspended invisible somewheres. But mom smiled.

Then dad signed the sketch in a big hand: "Lolly," and drew a small lollypop in the corner which was what the nickname had been shortened from over those years, and took those big steps he had without a sign that he knew me and held it up.

"Lolly, hay?" said one of those birds, "that's right, you're sweet enough to eat." It might've been spoken to a stranger for all the attention dad paid, and one of the college kids threw a quarter over into the sand and said, "Give it here, pop." And dad looked confused, as though the cigar smoke'd tanged at his eyes, and let it go. Then he fumbled in the sand for the quarter.

"That's mine," I yelled, and whacked that one over the head with the shoes, too.

"All right, all right, for Pete's sake," and he dropped the sketch, bobbing and waving arms as long's a gorilla's, while the one with Gordie's mouth made a big pretense of hiding behind him.

"I'll see *you* at *The Breakers*," I said to dad who stood brushing the sand off the quarter and gave no never mind that he'd heard. Then I set down the shoes and patted my hair in place, more for effect and to watch those two hulks' mouths hang open. Then I rolled up the sketch and picked up the shoes and strolled over to *The Breakers* and ordered two cokes.

Dad came to the open door by the salt-water-taffy counter and stood there shifting his feet. He had sure gotten gaunt and stringy since I saw him last, so god-awful burnt like you'd say he'd been basted in the sun. Then he came clopping those old wooden sandals across the neat tiled floor of *The Breakers* — all white tile that I used to love so to feel cool beneath my feet when he brought me here as a kid like that pigtailed one. He was carting the sketch pad, a whopper, and he shifted it up on the marble table and sat down, kind of tentatively like you'd spread a seat cover that you didn't intend to stay put. He had just about as much substance front to back.

"Well, Lolly," he said, with a smile so small that it seemed to be fading out from something he'd said a moment ago.

"Who's watching your easel, dad," I said. For a minute he looked blank, like Johnny often did, but Johnny'd be putting on, because he had a memory like a steel trap. At first I thought dad was putting on too, but his hand shifted kind of aimlessly across the pad like he was trying to pick out a tune by ear on a keyboard without any face, and I knew he'd forgotten it. That didn't strike me at first because I was watching his hand. I loved his

hands, his and mom's. They were perfect and long and I'd always wanted them, but I got everything sawed off and short, legs and everything. I hated "curly" but I hated "shorty" worse. Mom's hands and his were meant to be held together and that's how I always thought of them because once they were always that way. Philip took me to the museum in Philly as a fifteenth birthday present last year — the big cheapskate — but I did see a pair of hands there like mom and dad's, worked out of a stone block that hadn't been finished. Theirs were finished, all right.

"You wait," he said, and got up and clopped off again. I saw those two wolves hitched up on the railing across the boards and grinning in, so I shifted deliberately with a look that was suitable and kind of arch, like Grace Kelly's, and so I had my back to him when he came in again and I pretended that I was a lady waiting for a gentleman at a fancy table. He stood the easel up in the aisle between the tables and sat down; then he got up and put the pad on the easel and sat down again — all very quiet now that he didn't have to move far. I liked to watch him: he was like a gentleman, very quiet and unhurried.

Then he looked at me with that little smile still fading from his face as though he were waiting for an answer.

"Drink the coke before the ice melts, dad," I said.

"This is very thoughtful." He stirred the ice about.

"The boys'd like to see you; we're at the same place," I said.

By the time dad got around to preparing an answer, a sawed-off character that I guess was the manager in a white striped summer suit and too god-awful neat to live was standing beside him and clearing his throat like he'd a mouth full of distress and saying: "I hope you don't intend to leave these here much longer, sir?" The way he said "sir" I'd of whacked him with the shoes except they were on the floor under the table.

"Come on, dad," I said.

"Of course," and before I could stop him, he'd put the quarter on the table, but when he turned away to get the easel I slipped down two dimes with a hard look at the sawed-off manager and on the way out I dropped the quarter back in dad's pants' pocket. It didn't make any noise hitting anything else when it went in.

It was warm on the boardwalk curving up to the Inlet, with the sun everywhere about — in the dark brown velvet sheen of the boards, and the soft warmth up from them, and coming in on the breeze from the ocean that I could feel move against my face almost like mom's breath because it was warm and good. I took his pad from him and tucked the shoes and pad and sketch under one arm so's I could hold his arm; and we just strolled and dad began to talk. It was wonderful to listen to him, so colorful that everything seemed to, oh, seemed to be *alive.* He always knew more about us than you'd think, though it might be something months old, and I knew how he did it — he'd take it into his head every few months when he could scrape together enough money to phone Jonathan Welk (that was his old friend, our next-door-but-one neighbor in Philly) even if he was in some little old Florida fishing village on the gulf. But he never called us direct since that time just after mom died. Not

that anybody'd ever said anything'd hurt him, except possibly Phil in one of his god-almighty moods, but I think he just was afraid now that some other terrible thing like that might come to him out of the blue, and he was timid like a dog or a cat that'd seem to understand getting booted down the steps everywhere but at its own place.

We had to walk slow because of his wooden clod-hoppers, and that was the way I wanted it now — though once it had been fun to stretch my sawed-off legs to catch up with him, fun for mom, and me, and all of us.

"You're getting tall, Lolly," and I said, "Oh, get out," because it was one of our old jokes. "And that trip to the museum, how did it turn out?" Then I almost told him about the hands but it was too hard to get into words. Besides, it wasn't like him to ask me about something that'd happened more than a year ago and that I'd already told him about. I caught his hand then so's we wouldn't get separated in that god-awful mob that hangs about Garden Pier.

Dad's easel kept prodding people and we were mighty unpopular but I knew that without paying no never mind to it because dad talked about the boys when they were young, and how Paul was almost smart enough to dodge First Confession but got caught and dragged down from where he'd hid in St. Pete's old belfry but he wouldn't have if he hadn't leaned against the rope. And how mom had almost sent me to a convent school at the Square but couldn't because of the war and no money. Now Paul's going in the seminary next year, and Philip's marrying some stuck-up model with nice long legs and everything else that counts and Johnny's headed for the navy, and that'll only leave Gordie and me. It seemed that nothing was ever lost the way dad remembered it all. And dad bobbed along with the easel poking people and every once in a while I'd crane around to look up into his face and see that little gentle smile, and he kept searching back as he always did, bringing all the old days back as though he were reaching for something and couldn't quite but almost put his finger on it. I didn't want the walk to end, but something kept bothering me every time I glared at someone complaining about getting nudged by that easel. I had never known him to forget anything before, but he'd almost left the easel there on the beach. I held his hand up against my cheek and rubbed it back and forth; there were tiny brown hairs matted across the back though his head was all over gray, but the skin was hard and cracked, not smooth like the stone hands at the museum that he'd forgotten I'd told him about and I wondered what kind of a god-awful menial job he'd had that winter. We had stopped for a minute and over dad's hand against my mouth I saw two old harpies staring as though they disapproved and I couldn't figure it out, and then I saw our reflection in a store window and it hit me so hard that I hated them all and their ugly old dirty minds and I wanted to hold dad and hold him and say "Take me back with you, anywhere; let me take care of you and bring Gordie and let everyone know it and clean your clothes and help you shave and have a home where you are even if it means being movers all the time." Because in the mirror in the window of that fancy dress shop I saw a

terrible thing: that dad looked like some god-awful artist bum and I didn't look like him in any way because I had mom's features though she was tall and like a princess — and I'd wanted to be a woman, and I guess I was except for the bare feet, with the tight silk blouse and the neat blue sheath skirt to go with my eyes that Johnny'd bought me for my birthday so that I wonder what those old harpies thought of dad and me — if I was some kind of a pick-up or something because I guess to them and all the world we weren't a family and didn't really have a home together and now dad had forgotten the easel and maybe would begin to forget it all and where would our home be at all then?

II

The apartment was on a side street in the Inlet section, and this was the first year I'd noticed how beat up the whole surroundings were. But from a corner of the kitchen window you could see through a slit between buildings that somehow just went on and on as though all the buildings that were so cramped just opened up so that it would be there, why you could see like at the wrong end of a telescope a few yards of boardwalk and the chairs passing back and forth and beyond that the ocean that sometimes startled because it was so blue and like painted there between the sick yellow brick and weather-worn wood houses. But when I left Dad sitting on the edge of the couch in the big shoddy living room as though he'd a bus to catch and went into that hole-in-the-wall kitchen to make him tea, there were white caps on the blue in a tiny white line like lace at mother's throat or tiny white snail shells on a string that he'd made for me once. And I'd asked Johnny I guess last year why Dad sat like that and he'd looked long at me with the way he had (he always had patience to answer me) and he said: "So you've noticed that too, Lolly." And I said yes I noticed things. We were back at the old house in Philly and up and down the street the sycamores had broken out in bright green tiny leaves like speckled fans when you looked up into them and the spring scent I never could track down though I chewed on hedges and sucked at sprigs of vines was over everything. But what'd made me ask it was that the trees had that kind of quality as though they were hesitating and someone'd fold up the fans with a tap and all would whisk away, scent and tiny leaves and all. I had never felt that way in spring before. "It's because he loves us and he's afraid, Lolly," Johnny said. He leaned down and kissed me on the forehead. " 'Jeepers creepers,' " he sang off key — only Paul can sing, " 'where'd you get them peepers?' "

"Go along with you," I said, "go along with you."

But now I took down the blue willow cup and saucer that didn't come from Sears but down through mother's family and was made in England years back. When I was little it used to always sit on the window sill facing the ocean wherever we were with ivy in it or great ear-like leaves, and I remember watching it in the white sunlight that burned off the ocean so long that I thought I could go through the blue gate and under the Chinese arch into the garden where the tall ladies and stiff gentlemen in flowing

robes walked by the water. And when we were home it was at the kitchen window and the blue gate was ajar into a green garden with a willow pond. Oh, when I was little then and mama sang by the window, that gate was into my spring garden, and I'm sure I did once run quick to the back door to get behind the cup and the blue gate and see the great ladies standing with slim hands upraised by the tall blue capped gentlemen in our brick back yard. But maybe I only dreamed of that, and maybe I never dared look behind the cup to see if they were there. Because there is another picture of that backyard in my mind: a house of scrap boards close to the ground in the lowest branches of the mulberry tree and Phil and Johnny hanging down from it, and Gordie tossing an apple core clear over the neighbor's yard at Mr. Welk's cat on his clapboard fence. I took it into the parlor to Dad, who hadn't moved from the edge of the couch.

"Ah," he said, "it isn't broken yet." There was a wonder in his voice. "Is this yours now, Lolly?"

"It's ours, daddy," I said. He held the cup in both hands . . .

THE CHRISTMAS ROSE
Jean Charlot

The Quittance of the Wound

● Brother Antoninus, O.P.

But God is good. Nor has ever, once,
In His keeping of this world,
Worked an evil in men's lives;
Not in all those losses, those takings,
The dark denials each in his time assumes and must ponder;
Nor in the great deprivations exacted of His saints,
When he would seem to have broken them in His bare hand
With His love and His wisdom —
Not once has He ever
Wrought an evil in men's lives.

Only the flawed of heart foul Him,
Only the blind, a fist pinched at the sky,
A mouth smokey with imprecation;
Or that sullen hutch of the heart's embittered brood,
Like the serpent's egg
Hatched out in the breast.

But as for these, His own,
These, who served as His saints,
These, in the luminous purity of their love
Knelt down on their deprivation,
Dipping the very wounds of self
In the painful balm of that compliance;
And let that piercing Finger
Probe to an inmost hurt,
Nor shrank to be traced.

These have taken the plight a trust entails,
And not doubted, and have counted
Every tremor of the soul,
And that long cry of woe
Shut back down into the cropped heart
As only the cleanliest quittance
Against the rapture of His face.

And have put forth a hand to take up the loss,
Though fear be with it;
And the hand sustains.

Some Aspects of Freedom in Sartre's Existentialism

• Joseph C. Mihalich

PHILOSOPHICAL criticism is complicated by the fact that different philosophical systems assign diverse meanings to common terms and concepts. The notion of individual freedom is a case in point. Jean-Paul Sartre, the French existentialist philosopher, advances a wholly unique intrepretation of personal freedom — ". . . a freedom more acute than, possibly, has been seen in two thousand years of philosophy."[1] For Sartre, *freedom is the human reality*. Human existence is constant choice, and the prerequisite for such existence is *absolute freedom*. Sartre makes human reality and freedom synonymous — *to be* (human) is *to be free*. This is a radical departure from the traditional notion of freedom as the absence of intrinsic and extrinsic restraint in the physical and moral orders. This latter view holds that the human agent is free to choose one finite good rather than another (or not to choose at all), even though the human volitional faculty (will) is necessarily ordained to Infinite Good as its natural end. Thus freedom is a *condition* of existing rather than being or existence itself. We are free to act in a certain way or not to act at all, but our free activity is not our very being.

Jean-Paul Sartre is perhaps the most widely known of the half-dozen leading figures in the contemporary existentialist movement. Sartre enjoyed immense popularity after the close of World War II, a popularity not without its shortcomings since it tended to emphasize the eccentric individuality of the *avant-garde* rather than the subtleties of Sartre's formal philosophy. Fortunately, "left-bank bohemianism" is a transitory and incidental aspect of Sartrian existentialism. Although existentialism is popularly identified with Sartre, the existentialist movement can be traced at least to Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), the melancholy Danish philosopher-theologian, and the German pessimist Frederick Nietzsche (1844-1900). In its broader aspects, existentialism has an interesting evolution involving such figures as the 17th century semi-mystic Pascal and the "first existentialist," St. Augustine. Contemporary existentialism on the European continent is largely the work of Edmund Husserl, the German founder of the school of phenomenology, and fellow-countrymen Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers, along with Frenchmen Gabriel Marcel and Sartre.

In his critical work *The Existentialists*, James Collins remarks that perhaps the most common mistake in the study of existentialism is the tendency to regard all existentialists as uniformly representative of the same doctrinal trend.[2] This leads to the incongruity of forcing into a common mold such distinctively different thinkers as Sartre, an avowed atheist,

and Marcel, a devout Catholic. There is, however, a common starting point for all the various types of existentialist expression. This common starting point is the stark and often brutal fact of our own existence, the fact of our *being here* in this concrete world. It has been observed that existentialism began as an expression of opposition against idealism and abstractionism. George Hegel, the great German idealist, represents the type of philosophical position that ignited the existentialist revolt. Hegel's explanation of the universe as the "Absolute Idea unfolding itself" disturbed Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, who saw in such an abstract solution the renunciation of man the individual. The explanation of reality as Idea is of little avail to the individual faced with the very real problems of his own concrete existence. Existentialism is the answer to the plea of the *real person in a real world* who needs a spokesman who speaks the language of the concrete. The existentialist eschews the abstract and considers meaningful only those explanations which bear upon the real individual enmeshed in the vicissitudes of his subjective existence. For the existentialist, *truth* and *being* are not vague transcendental concepts but *my truth* and *my being.*

If it is possible (let alone advisable) to sum up a philosophy of being in one sentence, this sentence from Sartre's novel *Nausea* might suffice: "Every existing thing is born without reason, prolongs itself out of weakness and dies by chance."[3] Allowing for dramatic license, these words contain Sartre's basic theses — viz., that existing is "absurd" *(de trop)* in that it cannot be explained or justified; that existing itself is fraught with confusion and *bad faith;* and that death too is *de trop* and wholly beyond anticipation and preparation. Sartre aligns two "regions" of being, Being-for-itself *(pour-soi)* and Being-in-itself *(en-soi).* Being-for-itself is human reality, and human reality — in addition to being absolute freedom — is pure consciousness. Being-in-itself is all else — everything that is not human reality. Unlike the For-itself, which is pure consciousness, Being-in-itself is "dumb-packed-togetherness" and rigid non-consciousness. The two regions of being are unalterably opposed: consciousness must always remain consciousness, and massive being must remain passive and dumb. This radical bipolarity is the crux of Sartre's doctrine. This is so because the *pour-soi* or For-itself expends its existence in a constant effort to become something in its own right — *Being-in-itself.* This can never be. To become something, to become Being-in-itself, Being-for-itself would necessarily have to renounce its consciousness. But this would give rise to a dual contradiction. It is a contradiction to posit Being-for-itself which is not full and complete and pure consciousness, and it is equally contradictory to posit Being-in-itself which is knowledgeable and conscious. Therefore the *pour-soi* or Being-for-itself must constantly seek and never find. It must remain "haunted by being" without any hope of achieving it. In his incisive analysis of Sartre's phenomenological ontology, Wilfrid Desan asserts that ". . . this is the supreme paradox — the Cogito (human reality) has no sense without this haunting totality. Consciousness presupposes this absolute transcendency in the midst of its most intimate immanence."[4]

The notion of human reality as absolute freedom flows from the peculiar negativity which characterizes it in Sartre's philosophy. In the

manner outlined above, human existence (Being-for-itself) is continually "out of itself" and in flight toward the stability and permanence represented in Being-in-itself. Human reality must remain wholly *translucid;* the slightest measure of permanence (even the permanence of an egological structure) is anathema. Permanence kills consciousness, and consciousness is the *raison d'être* of the *pour-soi.* Being-for-itself must remain actually *nothing* (no thing) and therefore is not bound by the causal limitations of "thingness." Being-for-itself is sheer, pure freedom because it comes from no cause and finds its reason for being in its own activity. The basis of this reasoning is Sartre's contention that *existence precedes essence,* meaning that mankind is nothing else but what the individual man makes it to be. In Sartre's own words, ". . . man first of all is the being who hurls himself toward a future and who is conscious of imagining himself as being in the future."[5] There is no universal essence or nature according to which man might pattern his actions and conduct. There is no abstract human nature because there is no God to conceive it. Sartre admits to being an atheist, but he is frank about the consequences:

> . . . The existentialist . . . thinks it very distressing that God does not exist, because all possibility of finding values in a heaven of ideas disappears along with Him; there can no longer be an *a priori* Good, since there is no infinite and perfect consciousness to think it. . . . If God does not exist, we find no values or commands to turn to which legitimize our conduct. So, in the bright realm of values, we have no excuse behind us, nor justification before us. We are alone, with no excuses.[6]

Man is "condemned to be free" and is left to create or *invent* his course of action in accordance with the concrete situation which faces him.

An important point about the Sartrian notion of freedom is the fact that the boundlessness of this freedom does not turn it into license. Despite a rather prevalent popular conception, Sartre's existentialism is not developed as a systematic opportunity for the exercise of whim and caprice. We are free, but not free to do anything we please with no regard for the consequences. On the contrary, such drastic freedom brings with it immense responsibility. Since I make my world in concert with other human realities, the finished product is a concrete manifestation of my wisdom or my folly. A fundamental premise in Sartre's doctrine is the need for the individual to be consciously *involved,* to belong, to be *engagé.* The result is that man acts not in a kind of socio-personal vacuum, but rather in the context of a concrete situation in which he himself is necessarily involved. The individual man chooses and acts, but his choice and his action involves all mankind. For Sartre, moral choice (human activity) is pure *invention* likened to artistic creation. It is unrealistic to ask (with reference to an artist), "What painting ought he to make?" We recognize the fact that there are no "*a priori* aesthetic values" and that the measure of the painting is the degree of correspondence between what the artist intended and the result.[7] Man the artist and man the ethician have this in common: both are necessarily free and individualistic, but neither the work of art nor the human deed is properly arbitrary.

The relationship between absolute human freedom and human *mores* is one of the most misconstrued aspects of Sartre's philosophy. There exists a peculiar type of mind or personality that naturally gravitates toward an organized movement that features absolute freedom as a basic characteristic. The organization makes this tendency respectable and justified, and thus masks to an extent the underlying yen to indulge in license and lawlessness behind an intellectual screen. Those who join the movement in this way see the absolute freedom but minimize the concomitant responsibility. It is not strange that a philosophy such as Sartre's should flourish in France and Europe after World War II. Viewed from the aspect of its insistence upon absolute freedom, it probably seemed a most welcome ideological antidote for the confinements and tensions of millions who suffered — literally or vicariously — the hardships of war and enemy occupation. Freedom means a great deal more in Sartre's system than many who are attracted to it ever come to realize. Freedom has another side, and this is responsibility. A key term in the Sartrian lexicon is *anguish.* And anguish is rooted in the awareness of each human being that my choices and my actions involve not only me but all mankind, coupled with the realization that nothing and no one can assure me that this is the right choice and the right action. Man makes and defines himself through his own activity, but the defining takes place only in "relationship to involvement." We can only invent in accordance with the concrete situation facing us, and part of this concrete situation is the awesome realization that upon our choice depends the happiness of the human race.

To give Sartre his just due, there is the germ of a moral code — albeit a strange one — in his existentialist doctrine. The difficulty is that it must forever remain merely germinal and can never mature. Sartre's basic premises concerning human reality and his denial of the existence of God preclude a truly personal ethics. If the measure of man is the being and the actions of the individual, there is no possibility for recourse to an objective code of behavior to guarantee the consistent discharge of man's duties to himself and to others. Sartre's human reality exists in an atmosphere of emptiness and enmity, amid overtones of tragedy and futility. The very existence of other human realities is a danger for me, for my absolute freedom flows from my existence as conscious *subject* rather than dumb *object* (Being-in-itself). But other human realities are also *subject*, and so tend to regard me as *object.* When I am reduced to the level of object, I lose my most precious attributes — absolute freedom and pure consciousness. So we play a kind of rather serious game with other people in which we attempt to assert our subjectivity while the Other attempts to dilute this subjectivity by seeing us as object. The impossibility of a personal ethics in the Sartrian context is dramatized in the often-cited sequence from Sartre's play *No Exit.* A group of characters who have passed on from this life are surprised at the nature of their new surroundings: "So this is hell. I'd never have believed it. You remember all we were told about torture chambers, the fire and brimstone, the 'burning marl.' Old wives' tales! There's no need for redhot pokers. Hell is — other people!"[8]

Nor is it merely ethics that creates problems for Sartre. His premises force him into untenable positions also in the areas of epistemology and

metaphysics. Epistemologically, Sartre's existentialism proceeds according to the phenomenological method. The phenomenological method is simply the *description of phenomena* as they appear to the apprehending consciousness. Existentialism opposes deduction and *a priori* reasoning, primarily because avoidance of deduction and *a priori* reasoning is the best guarantee against the so-called "sterile abstractionism" of Aristotelianism. With deduction and *a priori* reasoning excluded, all that is left is the concrete individual and the array of objects and states of consciousness which confront him. Thus the only type of analysis possible is the description of these phenomena as they manifest themselves. This necessarily limits the reporter to the concrete object and situation, with no opportunity to transcend the manifestations and posit the existence of an abstract entity beyond that which appears.

If the phenomenological method has any advantage, it is the advantage of guaranteeing that human knowledge is integrated and unified. It is the *whole* person who is knowing, through the ministry of his senses and emotions and intellect and will. Despite this possible advantage, the phenomenological epistemology is not without its faults. It is one thing to integrate the faculties of man so that his cognitive experience reflects every aspect of his mode of being. It is quite another thing to eliminate the distinction between faculties altogether, and thus make of human knowledge a largely inexplicable thing with little more justification than the confrontational unity that results from placing any two objects in close proximity to one another. The phenomenological approach is so intent on avoiding rationalism that it tends to reduce human knowledge more to *feeling* than anything else. The best illustration of this is the critical role of the *mood* in both Sartre and Heidegger, an interesting subject which is beyond practical space considerations. The sum and substance of all this is that it avails us little to rob the human being of the efficacy of his intellect, only to grant the same efficacy to the emotions. An integrated cognitive experience is the goal, but it is no more attainable through an unhealthy preponderance of mood and emotion than an unhealthy preponderance of intellect. In addition to these difficulties in the ethical and epistemological contexts, Sartre's existentialism forfeits itself in the area of metaphysics. Existentialism is not truly metaphysical because it ignores or denies the need to search for ultimate origins. Sartre puts the problem of origins in the context of the *de trop* ("too much"), absurd in that it cannot be explained. Metaphysics is the science of all things that exist from the point of view of their existence, and to be consistent this must include their ultimate causes and principles. Metaphysics does not begin in some nebulous area beyond physical existents; it includes in its analysis physical as well as non-physical realities, and is characterized by its *formal object* or point of view (existence as such). Sartre attempts to avoid the issue by distinguishing between *metaphysics* and *ontology* on the grounds that the former is the search for origins and the latter is the study of being as such.[9] Then he proceeds to fashion a "Phenomenological Ontology" which discusses being without reference to origins. Existentialism foregoes a claim to metaphysics for another and perhaps more significant reason — namely, that existentialism never gets sufficiently clear of its *method* to establish a *content*. It was remarked

earlier that Sartre's existentialism is founded on phenomenological analysis or description. But phenomenological analysis is a method and only a method. Phenomenology is an activity — a manner of procedure — and cannot at the same time be the product or the result of a method. In other words, it cannot be both activity and system. If this is granted, Sartre's "phenomenological ontology" is a contradiction in terms — if it is phenomenology (methods) it cannot be at the same time ontology (system). In last analysis, phenomenologists simply confuse metaphysics with epistemology. Then *what* we know is identified with *how* we know it.

It is for reasons such as these that Sartre's existentialism (and systems like it) must fail — for all their tortuous ingenuity — in their bid to replace traditional Aristotelianism as the "perennial philosophy." The perennial philosophy is so-called because it is meaningful to all men in all times. The basis of contemporary existentialism's claim to the title is that only a philosophy of the concrete (as opposed to the abstract) can adequately serve the needs of the individual in the changing times. Existentialism plunges the subject into the very vortex of his own existence with all its multiple cares and worries and anxieties. Existentialism makes existing a very personal matter of encounter and crisis. But there is more to existence than *simply* my subjectivity, and to what avail is encounter and crisis if it is always "*encounter with nothingness.*"[10] Granting that not every aspect of reality is equally susceptible to explanation and analysis, a constant pattern of refusal to offer realistic answers to critical questions is not in existentialism's favor. A philosophical system is not made more realistic simply through the fact of its being more concrete. A philosophical system is somehow obligated to suggest something more meaningful than "absurdity" as the answer to the question of the origin of reality. In his introduction to a collection of Heidegger's essays, Werner Brock notes that a philosopher necessarily differs from other types of scholars in that the philosopher touches and shapes the very existence of his readers.[11] The philosopher performs only half his function when he informs. He must also extend to his listeners the opportunity to fathom new and personal insights into the weighty problem of their own being. This is the awakening to the search for ultimate truth, a serious and meaningful journey with far-reaching consequences. It is only reasonable to expect that a philosophy oriented to the positive rather than the negative is a more efficacious vehicle for this calculated enlightenment. In order to impart meaning *to* the world, a philosophical system ought first to satisfy itself that there is purpose *in* the world. The authenticity of the *philosophia perennis* lies ultimately in its recognition of the stability and integrity of human reality, and the grounding of meaning in the existence of God.

FOOTNOTES

1 Wilfrid Desan, *The Tragic Finale*, Harvard University Press, 1954, p. 107.

2 James Collins, *The Existentialists*, Regnery, 1952.

3 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, translated by Lloyd Alexander, The New Classics Series, New Directions, 1938, p. 180.

4 Desan, *op. cit.*, p. 33. The substance of this essay is at least materially the result of the author's association with Professor Desan at Georgetown University, Washington, D. C. The title of Professor Desan's book, *The Tragic Finale*, refers to the flagrant futility of the *pour-soi's* never-ending attempts to become *Being-in-Itself*.

[5] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism*, translated by Bernard Frechtman, Philosophical Library, p. 27.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 27.
[7] *Ibid.*, p. 50.
[8] Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit and Three Other Plays*, translated by Stuart Gilbert and Lionel Abel, Vintage Books, 1958, pp. 46 - 47.
[9] Desan, *op. cit.*, Chapter IX, pp. 174 - 184.
[10] This is the title of Helmut Kuhn's critique of existentialism. Cf. Helmut Kuhn, *Encounter With Nothingness*, 1949.
[11] Martin Heidegger, *Existence and Being*, Introduction by Werner Brock, Regenery, 1949.

A Psalm for Christmas

● **Thomas P. McDonnell**

Mother of silence,
We talk too loud and long;
Man's talk tears down the silence
Of your woven Word,
Where soft in virgin flesh
You weave the infant Christ in holy warmth.

But we babble on,
Like captive slaves singing crude songs
In a strange land,
And the sponsored carols
Come crowding down the visible air
Through hieroglyphics of crooked steel.

O Lady of contemplation,
Let me go somewhere in silence
By fragrant fir where starwheels whirl
In dazzling dance
To celebrate His holy birth.

Encompass me now, encircling Queen,
In the province of your love;
Sing me the joy of holly green hope,
Tell me the dread of red berry grief;
Let me now beg, borrow, bring
From your cupped hands
The slightest particle of prayer
To nourish me now in the living light,
While sanctity sings in your cradling bones
And silence becomes your song.

Saint Aloysius at Mid-day

● Dolores Kendrick

He who is innocent of hands and pure of heart shall go up unto the mountain of the Lord. — Psalm 23

I.

The horn blasts judgment before the golden seat
Of the orbited sun and feeds the bread-line
Of widows and orphans and men with white
Collars and the ditch-men dying of dirt,
And old men singing psalms in silence
In the monotony of the cadenced clock
That watches
And the pigeon-men who breed the park
And boys who paint their shadows as they
Walk; and the book-men searching
And cotton-candied girls swinging ther way
Through the glazed light. And in the church
The bleeding Christ moves again toward
His Hour while the city's anthems praise
The finished half-day, ended forever,
Gone
And leads the percussioned present into the horn's mouth.

II.

Confessional-white, the pewed church burns
From its altar in stilled sweetness
And cups the blood of the Saviour lying in labor;
Fervid the red-fire of the incarnate hour consumes
The morning's dregs and waste and wipes
Clean the darkened moment masked to
All but the waiting Christ,
Scrubbed and silenced
The knee-bending church faces the finite:
Deliver us from evil . . . . from the jaws
Of the lion and the wind's womb,
The pews of the shrouded paupers, the bowels
Of wooden streets and the mouth of the horn.
Show us the arrowed bell that spreads
Through the fattened flesh of the sun-city
And ordains the sacred marriage of Time Innocent
To Time Redeemed in singing Angelus.

PARADE
Maria Bonomi

WINTER
Brother Dativus Gabriel, F.S.C.

The Artists

CARL MERSCHEL is no newcomer to **four quarters**. His famous block prints have appeared in many previous issues. English-born FRED WASSALL attended Brighton Art Academy and the Slade School in London. He has had a one-man show at the Weeks Gallery in Washington, D. C., but he has never disclosed the religious significance of the red ribbon or "swag" which runs through all his surrealist paintings. JAMES McDERMOTT is a senior art major at Loras College, Dubuque, Iowa. His home is in Wisconsin. MARIA BONOMI, a gifted and imaginative young Brazilian, recently had an impressive show of her wood-cuts at the Roland de Aenlle Gallery in New York. She uses the wood-cut as a primary means of expression and develops the invention of symbols to correspond to essential three-dimensional delineation. BROTHER DATIVUS GABRIEL, F.S.C., formerly of La Salle College, Philadelphia, Pa., is now teaching at La Salle College, Bacolod City, Philippine Islands. JEAN CHARLOT, famed for his frescoes, is Professor of Art at the University of Hawaii, Honolulu.

Paul in Ephesus

● Samuel J. Hazo

"And you can see and hear for yourselves that this Paul has persuaded a whole multitude to change their allegiance, not only at Ephesus but over most of Asia . . ."

Acts, 19-26

Seabound or overland, in turns
before sleep or easing after grief,
I vie with an inveigling self
not long deterred — too soon undone
by fear

of faltering, by force of pain's
slow pressure none is spared for long —
its strain more visceral than lung,
yet circumambient as sun
or air . . .

The hand I fist at Greece is mine
and man's — intrepid in its clench.
No hope less random than the chance
of reconciling peace and pain
I share

with you, beloved, will undo
my violent zeal for Ephesus.
A rebel to the rule of Zeus,
I dare your glory in this vow
I swear.

Darkness

● Genevieve K. Stephens

Appointed
For sleep
Yet dreams arise
To torment —
Shepherd
And
Sheep.

MELCHISEDECH
Carl Merschel

Little Office

● **Thomas P. McDonnell**

I think of the tremendous
Mystery of the Virgin
Mary, who was given more
Than any other mortal
To know the ultimate depths
Of man's profound reality;

And yet we turn it all to
Filigree and limpid use,
Of stars and waxen roses
We weave the image of our
Sentimental empty lives
To clothe the Virgin's bones;

I close my eyes to eclipse
The blaze of the burning sun,
And there in sunken sockets
Of the visionary soul,
Dark bolts of the Virgin's love
Scorch my eyes to see her Lord.

The Sheepshank

● Thomas J. McCauley

THE MOTOR roared as the bus came alive, and Bill Powers, as if he too had been reborn, inched forward on his seat, eagerly, realizing the anxiety that had swelled within him; the motor revved, tingling Bill's every nerve.

It would be there, coming through the sunbeam mist along the Mediterranean shoreline in the west, that the Rock would come to him. Behind him, his ship, her cargo discharged on the foreign soil, lay high in the water; now, emptied, she was buoyant, content, perhaps even proud, like a woman after maternity. Before him, somewhere, out of sight, the Rock awaited.

He smoothed a lapel of his new white suit: it was sharkskin, cool, and felt clean on his body.

Beside him, Ab grunted. He stared vacantly; he often stared that way — at nothing, as if shrouded with thought or, more likely, memory. Ab was old, his exact age a mystery.

"How long'll it take, Ab?"

"Not long." Ab's voice was like meat frying in hot grease. "It's about seventy mile." He cracked his knuckles, and the sleeves of his black sweater crept a few inches up his arms, baring two faded-blue chains that encircled each wrist. Their dull, almost colorless appearance showed that the chains had been forged when Ab was young, seemingly a mark of youthful vanity he probably regretted soon after, but about which he was able to do nothing at the time.

"It don't take long, Boy, but it's a tough road to travel."

"It'll seem like a lifetime to me . . . you know what I mean. This trip's something I've looked forward to." The racing motor shook the bus, and Bill became impatient. "What's holding us up?"

"A schedule. Can't hurry it, can't slow it down."

"I know that!" Bill was annoyed slightly by Ab's coolness. "I wish we'd get out of here; this slum section's hell!"

"I've seen worse." Ab sounded very sad. Although his wits had been somewhat dulled, perhaps by alcohol or some other dissipation, he gave the impression of possessing a higher type of intelligence than the ordinary seaman.

The bus lurched suddenly and rolled along the bumpy pier. Bill straightened himself in his seat; Ab remained slouched.

"You've seen the Rock before, haven't you, Ab?"

"Yeah, I was there before the war."

"Which war?"

"The first one." Ab's rheumy eyes blurred, and he wiped them with a dirty red handkerchief. "I lived there once . . . haven't been back since. I always stop at La Linea, the frontier town. Seamen call it *Spanishtown*."

"No stop-offs for me; I'll get to the Rock or die trying."

"You'll die anyway . . ." Ab

snorted, his shoulders jerked. "The Rock ain't what it's cracked up to be. Now Spanishtown's wide open."

"Well, I'll be damned if I don't get to the Rock."

The metal below Bill's feet grew warmer, and he smelled the pungent odor of burning gasoline and exhaust. The road behind the bus was clouded by carbon monoxide. Certain outstanding objects were still visible, but they, like veiled memories, partially-hidden reveries, were distorted in the gaseous haze.

"Now don't get your hopes too high; the Rock's over-rated."

"Then why did you sign on this tour?"

"You asked me to, remember? Besides, it's your first liberty. I wanted to show you the ropes: tell you what to drink and what'll blind you, and the girls . . . yeah, you got to watch them. They'll take you over and send you to sickbay to boot."

"You can have your wine, women, and song, Ab. You've been to the Rock; I never was. I just have to get there once. That's all, just once."

The bus left the slums and passed through one of the cleaner sections of town. To the right, a park appeared. Bill checked the tour booklet. *El Parque del Ayuntamiento.* It was a marvelous picture of order.

Ab nudged Bill, and, at the same time, the park was sucked into the wake of the bus and became dim, then disappeared in the monoxide cloud.

"What is it, Ab?" Half-consciously, Bill blamed the park's disappearance on Ab. It was silly, he knew, but it seemed as if Ab's elbow had hurried the park into the cloud behind him.

"I've been thinking, Kid. Why don't the two of us stop off in Spanishtown for a couple of minutes?"

"No!" Bill was startled by his determination. He meant to refuse but not so brusquely, especially to Ab. "Besides, Ab, you promised to go with me."

"It ain't that I don't want to; it's because I can't. I . . . I got in trouble there . . . once. They might still . . . well . . ."

"Gee, Ab." Bill was embarrassed by his choice of an expression: It was what a disappointed little boy would have said; it was . . . childish. "I don't care for boozin' and . . . and all . . . I'm strictly a sight-seer."

"Don't you bother with girls?"

"Sure! I mean no! I mean . . . not the way you mean." Bill felt his face grow warm. "See . . . back home, I had only a few dates. I used to read a lot. That's why I shipped; you know, like the posters say: *See the World?*"

"Well then, now's your chance. A little practical experience. You won't find this in books. Spanishtown'll be your Baptism of Fire."

Leaving Malaga, the bus ascended a hill. Framed in the window, a huge amphitheater lay in the center of an enormous picture postcard panorama of the city. It was the bullring: *La Plaza de Toros.* He had read of it in the ship's newspaper. The Romanesque arches of the circular stadium reminded him of pictures of the now-destroyed Coliseum in Rome.

"Yeah, Ab." Bill seemed to be speaking more to himself than to Ab. "Yeah, you can go to Spanishtown; I'm going to Gibraltar." He stared at *La Plaza de Toros,* until he could no longer see it.

Along the snaking road, the bus sped through the countryside as if

slicing the empty sea and its barren shoreline on the left from the ripe and fertile farmlands and vineyards on the right. The road itself was bumpy and had many sharp turns.

"When'll we see the Rock?" Bill pointed towards a small village which was taking shape in front of the bus. "Maybe the other side of this village . . ." He looked at the tour map. "*Fuengirola.*"

"We'll see it when we hit *Marbella,* the next village. It'll be only an outline then . . . a sort of shadow."

"Like a hint it's really there, huh?"

"Oh, it's there, all right. It's no myth."

The bus passed a small chapel across the road from which a cemetery was surrounded by the sandy beach. The chapel bell tolled the hour, and Ab stared at the tombstones, then took a deep breath. "Yeah, it's there. You'll be seeing it, sticking up in the air like a big lump of rock candy waiting for little boys to lick it." A scowl crept across Ab's face and immediately vanished. Was it a scowl? The many years at sea had carved a labyrinth of weatherbeaten crevices through the dark, leathery features and cast a veil over any emotion Ab expressed silently.

The chapel bell tolled again, then dimmed, and finally faded into the hum of the bus motor and the slapping of the surf against the beach. A wave hit the beach and quickly retreated again, vanishing into the sea from where it had come. The sea was calm aside from ripples and an occasional wave, but there were treacherous undercurrents beneath the apparent serenity of the water. A few nights before, they broke through, and the water churned wildly in the foul weather his ship had met off the Azores. It was as if the sea was stirred by the demons of hell. But, a good ship, she bore up well against these savage onslaughts.

A signpost sped past. *Marbella.*

Then, suddenly, the light dimmed, and Bill looked up. "I hope it doesn't rain." He spoke automatically in the manner of commenting on the weather, but he spoke in a low tone, as if in prayer.

"Rain or shine, my saloon . . . the one I'm going to, I mean, will be the same. Let's make a deal: you stop off in Spanishtown, and I'll try to sneak into Gibraltar with you."

Bill shook his head. He wasn't sure if he refused because he wanted so much to go to Gibraltar or because he didn't want Ab to enter a country in which he was a wanted man.

"It's only a little favor I ask, Boy. I've done . . . I'd do the same for you . . . I tell you what: you can have your pick of the girls!"

Bill felt a sympathy for Ab. It could be that he himself would someday be in a similar position — old and friendless and maybe just a little bit lonely. "All right, Ab, I won't give you a definite answer, but I'll think about it."

"That's all I ask." Ab smiled; it wasn't his usually cynical smile but a wide grin.

"That's the first time I've seen you smile since the night I met you." It was during the storm off the Azores that Bill met Ab. He was detailed to secure the lashings on a hatch and met Ab. He never noticed Ab among the crewmembers before.

"It's just that I'm glad you ain't deserting me. Some of the crew said

you ain't got the stuff, but I stuck up for you. I knew you wouldn't let me down."

"Wait a minute, I didn't say for sure yet."

"I know. I don't want to force you. I don't think I could. You got a mind of your own, ain't you? You got to make the choice. I want you to make the best of your liberty, that's all."

Bill grunted a reply, then thought of the Rock. No matter how hard he tried to evade them, however, other thoughts pervaded his reverie, thoughts of Spanishtown! The little frontier town seemed the key to some mysterious adventure. He often listened to the other crewmembers tell their sea-stories of liberties in foreign ports. *Foreign ports!* An intriguing sound. The bus struck a hole in the road, snapping Bill from his semi-trance. He looked at Ab.

"You stick with me, Boy. I ain't steered you wrong yet, have I? I mean the way I help you aboard ship and all." He lowered his voice, his eyes narrowed. "You still ain't scared of me, are you?"

"No, of course not!" Bill laughed to conceal his shame that his fright was so visible at their first meeting. Ab appeared suddenly that night from the darkness of the port side of the fantail and was soaking wet, as if he recently climbed aboard, and, in the heavy squalls, Bill couldn't see clearly, and Ab's eerie appearance reminded him of the terrible phantasies from which he, as a child, had hidden beneath the blanket of his bed. He didn't admit fear, but it must have registered on his face, for Ab laughed loudly while helping to secure the lashings. In a few days, they became fast friends, Bill following Ab everywhere and listening to him attentively.

"If you ain't scared of me, I can't hurt you none, right? So it won't hurt you none to stop off with me for a few minutes. If you don't like it, leave. I won't mind."

"You make it look like I don't want to go with you."

To the left of the road, a *gaucho* was herding some cattle into a wooden pen. The majority of the herd were cows, but there were a few bulls interspersed throughout the herd. How different, thought Bill, were these submissive bulls in comparison to the brave bulls that had died in *La Plaza de Toros*. To all outward appearances, however, they were the same.

"You know, Boy, maybe you didn't look at it this way, but the rest of the crew'll be waiting back on the ship to hear what you did on liberty."

"The truth never hurt anyone. I'll tell them I went — !"

"No! You don't know what I mean!" Ab's fist thudded against the arm of his seat. The tattooed chains quivered for a split second then became rigid again. "They'll ask me! And if you act like a schoolkid ashore, they'll treat you like one! Get a name like that now, and it'll stick the rest of your time at sea!"

"I don't care what they think!" Bill spoke quickly, his tone higher than normal. His hands had tightened on his thighs when Ab referred to the rest of his time at sea. He looked down and loosened his grip. "Do you think that?"

"No." Ab hunched down in his seat. "Besides, I won't tell them nothing."

Bill became uncomfortable. He could feel the wheels spinning beneath him and leaving mile after mile behind him and bringing him

closer to the Rock, to Spanishtown. He wished the bus would stop completely or, at least, slow down. The ruts in the road didn't bother him at first; now, they did.

"Shouldn't we have seen it by now, Ab?"

"Must be the weather."

A heavy fog had slipped in below the rainclouds, staying the rain. It was still cloudy overhead, threatening.

"How much farther we got?"

"*Estepona's* next; the border's twenty mile the other side."

Bill remained silent until the bus passed through *Estepona;* then he opened the top button of his shirt. "It's getting hot in here." A few windows in the front of the bus were open. In the rear, where he was seated, all windows were closed, and the air was stale. He felt as if a heavy net had been cast over his face, blocking the clean air from his lungs. He tried to open the window next to him; it was jammed.

Ab glanced at him and snorted. "You look a mess to be going over with them classy tourists. They'll lock you up for a bum."

"Yeah, I guess I do look pretty bad." Bill removed his coat and laid it across his knees. Immediately his legs grew warm where the coat touched. His shirt was wet with sweat and sticky. "Look at this; it was clean this morning." A finger-mark appeared where he touched his shirt. "I'd like to get these squared away."

"*Hah!* There's a touch of vanity in even you, huh? Well, play it smart. Get shipshape in Spanishtown, then cross the border."

"*Look, Ab!*" Bill's pitch was extra-high, excited. "There it is! There's the Rock!"

But the scene was disappointing. It wasn't what was expected; the fog spoiled it. The Rock seemed a shadow of a foggy screen.

"It doesn't . . . doesn't seem as big as the pictures, Ab."

"I told you — a tourist trap! Spanishtown's different! Now, if we — !"

"I told you I'd like to go! Honest to God, I would, Ab, but . . ."

"I'm only asking a . . . little favor . . . a little company . . ." Ab cast his eyes down. "Can't blame you too much. A young fellow don't want me ashore."

"Oh, no, Ab!" Bill grasped Ab's arm just above the faded-blue chain. "It isn't that!" Bill was saddened; Ab never asked for anything before. "Ask me anything else, will you, Ab?" Bill was almost pleading. It was as if he failed the old man's first test of their friendship.

Ab was silent.

Along the shoreline, in one of the skiffs moored to a dilapidated pier, a hairy, tattooed Spaniard, bared to the waist, was mending a heavy black fishing net. He was intent on his work; his skin was burnt, and his jet black hair was in wild disarray. Bill smiled as he thought of a lucky fish wriggling through the hole in the net to safety.

The sea had become rougher. White-capped waves struggled ashore, clutched at the sandy beach, then were dragged back into the darkened brine.

"Hey, Boy!" Ab twisted Bill around. "How you doing on this?" He withdrew a two-foot length of cord from his pocket. "Did you practice any?" He tied a sheepshank, undid it, and handed the cord to Bill. "Try it."

Bill tied the knot rapidly and handed the cord back to Ab.

"That's good, Boy; you learn fast.

I show you something once and you pick it right up."

"I got a good teacher." Bill winced at the reminder that he had failed Ab. Again he glanced at his soiled shirt. "Do you think I could get this squared away in Spanishtown?"

"Sure."

"Maybe I will stop off then. Yeah, I could for awhile, then make a quick run to Gibraltar."

"It's up to you, Boy."

"Ok, I'll do it; that's a promise."

The bus climbed a steep hill, and Bill was pressed back against the seat. In front of the bus, people, alone or in small groups, were also climbing the hill. Closer to the top of the hill, some of the people, tired from the climb, paused and rested along the wayside; others left the road entirely and sat amid a cluster of rocks off to the left of the road; still others, however, continued to climb.

"How much farther, Ab?"

"Up yonder the other side of this hill."

The bus started downward. The remainder of the road was a long curving cut through a flatland at the end of which was the border. The Rock was now almost wholly visible; only the summit was still veiled in clouds.

Bill sensed a tinge of remorse for having agreed to accompany Ab, but he couldn't truthfully say that he was sorry. This was in part-payment of the many favors and knowledge which he received from Ab. In a sense, it was a debt.

At the border Bill followed Ab from the bus, did not board the jitney which took the rest of the tourists across the wasteland dividing Spain from Gibraltar.

"They run pretty regular, I guess."

"I guess so, Boy."

Bill turned away from the Rock and faced Spanishtown. He was a little frightened and didn't know why. He laughed to cover his unexplainable fright. It was a hollow laugh. Then he slapped Ab on the back, and, together, they walked towards Spanishtown.

It was dirtier than Bill thought it would be. A slight breeze blew through the streets, a dry humid breeze that sent puffs of dust into the open windows and doors on both sides of the street. Bill coughed. He tried to speak but coughed again and dropped his coat on the dirt street. It was soiled where it had touched the ground. Ab turned into a side street; Bill followed. A poster advertising a bullfight hung on a wall. Bill couldn't read Spanish but admired the brave air the illustrator had given to the bull that died or was to die in some *plaza*. On the opposite side of the street, facing the poster, was a fish stand. The dead fish were piled helter-skelter. Their eyes were open, and they smelled bad. Behind the fishstand was a saloon. Within it, there were guttural noises and tinny music. The voices were raucous and obscene.

Pausing before the saloon, Bill held his breath, listening, half-perceiving in the distance a faintly discernible bell; he listened again but heard only the pandemonium which was the saloon. Entering, he became engulfed.

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